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== SPECIAL BIOTECHNOLOGY ISSUE ==

BIOTECHNOLOGY IN THE WORLD

In 2002, over 15 million farmers from 16 countries around the world planted over 50 million hectares of biotech crops. In addition to the United States, other countries growing biotech crops include Argentina, Canada, South Africa, Australia, China and Brazil.

The United States has successfully and safely grown and consumed biotech crops for over seven years. The major biotech crops grown around the world include soybeans, cotton, corn and canola.

As the rate of crop improvement through conventional crops slows, new and safe technologies need to be adapted to feed a growing world population. The land available for crop production is also shrinking and a significant amount of production is lost to pests, diseases, weeds and drought. Biotechnology has enormous potential to create crops that resist extreme weather, diseases and pests; require fewer chemicals; and are more nutritious for the humans and livestock that consume them.

"Around the world, scientists are working to develop new varieties of crops that can resist pests, use less water and generally thrive in less than optimal growing conditions. Hand-in-hand with scientific research, countries must adopt policies that allow their farmers to take advantage of new products being developed through research. Government policies should encourage the safe use of new technologies, not cause farmers and consumers to fear it."

— Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman

What is Biotechnology?

Agricultural biotechnology is a collection of scientific techniques, including genetic engineering, that are used to create, improve, or modify plants, animals, and microorganisms. Using conventional techniques, such as selective breeding, scientists have been working to improve plants and animals for human benefit for hundreds of years. Modern techniques now enable scientists to move genes (and therefore desirable traits) in ways they could not before -- and with greater ease and precision.

REGULATING BIOTECHNOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES

The Federal Government of the United States of America has a coordinated, risk-based system to ensure new biotechnology products are safe for the environment and human and animal health. Under a policy developed in 1986, three lead federal agencies — the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—have the responsibility for implementing the nation's biotechnology regulatory framework. Within this framework, the U.S. regulatory process is constantly being reassessed and refined for all foods, both bioengineered and traditional.

APHIS is the government's lead agency regulating the safe testing, under controlled circumstances, of biotechnology-derived, new plant varieties. APHIS regulates the movement, importation, and field-testing of genetically engineered plants and microorganisms through permitting and notification procedures.

The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FD&C Act) gives the **FDA** authority to regulate foods for humans and animals, including foods derived from bioengineered plants. Under the act, companies have a legal obligation to ensure that any food they sell meets the safety standards of the law. The safety standards apply equally to conventional food and genetically engineered food.

EPA is responsible for public health and environmental protection with regard to new plant-pesticidal substances (i.e., genes that work as a pesticide in a plant, for example, the Bt gene in corn or cotton) introduced into plants, or new uses of herbicides in conjunction with biotech plants.

The Cartagena Biosafety Protocol

More than 130 countries adopted the Biosafety Protocol on January 29, 2000, in Montreal, Canada. It is called the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to honor Cartagena, Colombia, which hosted the extraordinary Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1999. The objective of this first Protocol is to contribute to the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) — such as genetically engineered plants, animals and microbes — that cross international borders.

The Protocol provides countries the opportunity to obtain information before new biotech organisms are imported. It acknowledges each country's right to regulate bio-engineered organisms, subject to existing international obligations. It also creates a framework to help improve the capacity of developing countries to protect biodiversity.

WHAT IT DOES

The Protocol establishes an Internet-based "Biosafety Clearing-House" to help countries exchange scientific, technical, environmental and legal information about living modified organisms (LMOs).

It creates an advance informed agreement (AIA) procedure that in effect requires exporters to seek consent from an importing country before the first shipment of an LMO meant to be introduced into the environment, such as seeds for planting, fish for release or microorganisms for bioremediation.

It requires shipments of LMO commodities, such as maize or soybeans that are intended for direct use as food, feed or for processing, to be accompanied by documentation stating that such shipments "may contain" living modified organisms and are "not intended for intentional introduction into the environment." The Protocol establishes a

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process for considering identification that is more detailed and documentation of LMO commodities in international trade.

WHAT IT DOES NOT DO

The Protocol does not address food safety issues. Experts in other international fora, such as Codex Alimentarius, address food safety. It does not pertain to non-living products derived from genetically engineered plants or animals, such as milled maize or other processed food products. It does not require segregation of commodities that may contain living modified organisms. It does not subject commodities to the Protocol's AIA procedure, which would significantly disrupt trade and jeopardize food access, without commensurate benefit to the environment. The Protocol does not require consumer product labeling. The mandate of the Protocol is to address risks to biodiversity that may be presented by living modified organisms. The Protocol's requirement for documentation identifying commodity shipments as "may contain living modified organisms" and "not intended for intentional introduction into the environment" can be accomplished through shipping documentation.

To learn more about how agriculture biotechnology is regulated in the United States United States, please visit the following sites.

United States Coordinated Framework for Regulating Biotechnology

- http://usbiotechreg.nbii.gov/

International Organizations:

- **CODEX Alimentarius Commission**
- **Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**
- **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**
- **International Organization of Epizootics**
- **International Plant Protection Convention**
- **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development**
- **World Bank** **World Health Organization**

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